

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than fifty years, state fish and wildlife agencies have benefited from funds accumulated through the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson), the Federal Aid in Sport Fisheries Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson), and the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund (Wallop-Breaux), to support the conservation and management of game fish and wildlife species. These funds have been critical to the establishment of long-term state agency planning related to game species. Yet conservation efforts for the majority of fish and wildlife species, those that are not hunted or fished, have in large part been opportunistic and crisis-driven, limited by the availability of funding, and by a lack of strategic approaches to species and habitat conservation. With more than 1,000 species now listed on the Federal Endangered and Threatened species list, the need has never been greater for funding and planning to support the conservation, protection, and restoration of the full array of wildlife species, especially those not covered under traditional funding sources.

In 2001 Congress, recognizing this need, began providing annual funding allocations to supplement existing state fish and wildlife conservation programs. Along with this new funding came the responsibility of each state and territory to develop a Wildlife Action Plan. This North Carolina Wildlife Action Plan is being submitted to meet that obligation, and in the process, provide a conservation blueprint for agencies, organizations, industries, and academics across the state to advance the sound management of our fish and wildlife resources into the future. Within the document, we identify critical fish and wildlife resources and priority conservation needs associated with those resources. Our Plan is strengthened by all of the local, state, and regional conservation planning efforts that have preceded it; these efforts provided us a foundation upon which to build. Our Plan promotes proactive conservation measures to ensure cost-effective solutions (“keeping common species common”) instead of reactive measures enacted in the face of imminent losses.

Five goals form the core of the Plan: 1) to improve understanding of the species diversity in North Carolina and enhance our ability to make conservation or management decisions for all species, 2) to conserve and enhance habitats and the communities they support, 3) to foster partnerships and cooperative efforts among natural resource agencies, organizations, academia and private industry, 4) to support educational efforts to improve understanding of wildlife resources among the general public and conservation stakeholders, and 5) to support and improve existing regulations and programs aimed at conserving habitats and communities.

In order to meet these goals, we engaged hundreds of people across a broad spectrum of agencies and organizations. We continue to seek the feedback and input of conservation stakeholders.

Key themes that are perpetuated through the document include:

- The need to strengthen partnerships among natural resource agencies, organizations, academics, and individuals in order to meet shared goals and visions,
- The need to impact the landscape in a large-scale fashion, and to consider all components of a sustainable community of plants and animals,
- The need to gather additional information and fill knowledge gaps in order to advance our understanding of species and their habitats,
- The need to work cooperatively with private landowners to influence the conservation of natural resources across the majority of the state, and
- The need to educate and engage local governments, planning commissions, and urban publics about the importance of fish and wildlife conservation as a key component of successful land use planning.